

National Arts Festival to be extended in 2009, 2010

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The Grahamstown National Arts Festival will be extended next year to cater for the thousands of soccer fans who will visit the Eastern Cape during the Confederations Cup in 2009. This will also occur in 2010 for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Speaking to the media in Grahamstown during the official opening of this year's National Arts Festival, Premier Nosimo Balindlela said government had decided to prolong the National Arts Festival in 2009 and 2010, in order to cater for soccer fans visiting South Africa's shores for the Confederations Cup and the world cup.

The premier said the 12-day National Arts Festival which kicked off on Tuesday, remained a critical platform for people of different cultures to showcase and appreciate their cultures.

"We know that soccer fans are passionate people, and I am sure that they will come and spend their time here at the festival. We are planning to have a public viewing park for them."

Asked about whether the local residents were benefiting from the festival, Ms Balindlela outlined the interventions made by government to promote the now successful Kwam eMakana homestays (Township Bed and Breakfasts) initiative.

"All festival lovers who have been accommodated in the 'homestays' will tell you that they had an authentic township experience of hospitality.

"The homestays are run by home owners who are trained by government to understand the hospitality industry standards of best service," said Balindlela.

The premier announced that the provincial government has invested over R2 million to fund a number of different art form groups.

Nceba Mokoena, an organiser from the Office of the Premier, said the youth will play a big role in showcasing the province during this year's festival.

"We will be showcasing and profiling the province to our missions that will be coming from other provinces.

"We have trained our young people to become tour guides, this to help tourists who will be visiting the province," he said.

As part of the festival, the Office of the Premier will also be showcasing developmental programmes for the youth.

The festival is to showcase South Africa's rich and multi-faceted culture of drama, dance, visual arts, music, film, jazz, painting and sculpting among others.

It features an extensive line-up of South African and international events, mixing new talent with established stars and capturing the spirit of the moment for a broad spectrum of audiences.

Plasma screens have been erected to enable people to view the proceedings of the festival with ease.

According to the organisers, the festival is expected to attract more than 100 000 people.

The National Arts Festival started in 1974 with about 60 events.

The festival is sponsored by the Eastern Cape government, Standard Bank, the SABC, the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund and the National Arts Council.

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